DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 345 312 CS 507 822

AUTHOR Ikeda, Richiko
TITLE Analysis of TV Use by Chinese Immigrant Children: An Exploratory Study.
PUB DATE 4 Apr 92
NOTE 27p.; Paper presented at the Annual Sooner Communication Conference (Norman, OK, April 4, 1992).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Children; Communication Research; Cultural Context; Elementary Education; *English (Second Language); *Immigrants; *Language Acquisition; *Mass Media Use; Parent Participation; *Second Language Learning; *Television Viewing
IDENTIFIERS Media Exposure

ABSTRACT

A study explored the use of television by immigrant children in terms of language learning, investigating whether immigrant children watch television for purposes of language learning and whether they learn language through TV viewing. Unstructured interviews were conducted with eight Chinese immigrant children and seven of their mothers. The children ranged in age from 5 to 10 years, included 3 boys and 5 girls, and their period of stay in the United States ranged from 7 months to 6 years and 4 months. Their command of English varied widely. Findings showed that the immigrant children liked to watch TV, mostly watched TV alone, and liked cartoons; that their mothers wanted their children to learn English through TV; and that the children believed that they learned English, to some extent, through TV viewing, while mothers strongly believed so. Findings suggest that these immigrant children do not watch television specifically for language learning, but that their mothers expect TV to strongly affect their children's language acquisition. (Fourteen references are attached.) (SR)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED345312

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Richiko Ikeda

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

Analysis of TV Use by Chinese Immigrant Children: An Exploratory Study

Richiko Ikeda

Department of Communication

University of Oklahoma

Norman, OK 73019

(405) 325-2428

CS507822

Running head: IMMIGRANT CHILDREN'S TV USE

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Analysis of TV Use by Chinese Immigrant Children: An Exploratory Study

Abstract

This paper explores the use of TV by immigrant children in terms of language learning. Since this is an initial foray to discover the world of this area, unstructured interviews with Chinese immigrant children and their mothers were conducted as a pilot study to examine whether or not the following phenomena exist: (1) Do immigrant children watch TV for purposes of language learning? and (2) Through TV viewing, do immigrant children learn language? The findings indicates that the Chinese immigrant children do not watch TV specifically for language learning. However, their mothers expect them to learn language through TV viewing. Both the children and their mothers agree that the children learn language by viewing TV. Concerning the second phenomena, Merleau-Ponty's (1964) theory of affectivity and language is used to explain the possibility of the immigrant children's language learning through TV.

Analysis of TV Use by Chinese Immigrant Children: An Exploratory Study

How do immigrant children survive in a new country where everybody speaks a different language and behaves differently? They need to learn language, behavioral patterns and cultural norms of the host country in order to communicate with the people there. A previous study shows that TV is "an important source of education and information" for the children about the life style of their host country (Zohoori, 1988, p.111). Few studies, however, have investigated the issue of immigrant children's TV use. As an initial foray to discover the world of this area, this pilot study examines (1) how Chinese immigrant children use TV in terms of language learning and (2) how they learn the language of the host country through TV viewing.

Review of Literature

Although not much has been done on the use of TV by immigrant children, Kim (1976, 1977) recognizes the importance of media use by immigrants as a process of

acculturation. According to Kim (1977), "immigrants come to understand better the norms and values, and to adopt salient reference groups of the host society" (p. 66). Communication is crucial to acculturation. In her surveys of Korean immigrants, Kim found that mass media consumption is an important variable along with other variables such as cognitive structure, interpersonal communication. The result indicates that "the influence of interpersonal communication is stronger than that of mass media consumption in developing a complex and refined cognitive system in perceiving the host society" (p. 75). It may be true that interpersonal communication has stronger impact on acculturation than mass media consumption, since the interpersonal communication allows one to interact with others. However, the newcomers, who have limited contact with people of the host country, may rely on mass media more and use it as a means of acculturation.

Zohoori (1988) questions the claim that "new comers might depend heavily on the media of their host culture (particularly television due to its accessibility and comprehensibility) for information about language, norms,

behaviors, and expectations associated with life in the host country" (p. 106). In Zohoori's cross-cultural study (1988), uses of U. S. television by foreign children in the U. S. and their American counterparts are examined in terms of acculturation, cultivation, and uses and gratifications. According to acculturation, as it is mentioned above, high dependence on the media of their host country is expected (Zohoori, 1988); according to cultivation, in which the media (especially television) exerts great influence in altering perceptions of behavior (Infante, Rancer, & Womack, 1990), "foreign children in the U. S. may become dependent on television as a source of enculturation" (Zohoori, 1988). Uses and gratifications studies, attempting to explain the underlying motives for people's use of the mass media (Infante et al., 1990), have indicated that there are differences in motives among children of different cultures (Rubin, 1977).

Based on the three assumptions above, Zohoori (1988) proposes the following hypothesis:

Compared with American children, foreign children will:

(a) use U. S. television more as a source of information

> about and interaction with others, and as a means of diversion from social isolation; (b) like television programs more; (c) spend more time watching television; (d) identify more with television characters; and (e) believe more in the reality of television characters and events. (pp. 107-108)

In order to test this hypothesis, Zohoori surveyed 83 foreign children and 276 U. S. classmates. The result showed partial support for hypothesis 1a and 1b and support for hypothesis 1c, 1d, and 1e. This study demonstrated that there are differences between immigrants and American children in media use.

Zohoori (1988), however, did not mention any function of TV in terms of language learning. Since learning the language of the host country is an important factor for newcomers to survive, language learning through TV needs to be examined.

No research on TV use by immigrant children in terms of language learning has been done. It is suggested that the research on how TV influences language acquisition in young

children can be useful in understanding the case of immigrant children.

Rice and Woodmall's (1988) study shows the possibility of children's language learning through TV. This study investigates children's word learning in a laboratory viewing situation. Sixty-one preschool children--27 three-year-olds and 34 five-year-olds--were randomly assigned to experimental and control groups. The experimental group watched two 6 minute animated television programs with narration containing 20 novel words (object words, action words, attributed words, and affective statements); the control group watched the same program with narration using familiar words instead of novel words. Comprehension was tested before and after viewing. The results indicate that young children are able to learn new words of novel object, action, and attribution through viewing
TV program, which suggests "a robust initial word-acquisition mechanism" (p. 425). Furthermore, the effects of the treatment are more obvious for the older children, implying "possible influences of accumulated linguistic knowledge and/or prior

viewing experience" (p. 423) of the older children.

Rice and Woodmall's study (1988) explores the possibility of TV use for language learning by 3 to 5-year-old children who already started to speak full sentences. This raises an additional question about how children in a prelinguistic state learn language through TV. Meltzoff (1988) examined the possible impact of TV on infants (14 and 24 months) in a laboratory situation. These infants were exposed to a model on TV in order to measure level of imitation, either immediate or deferred. The results show significant imitation at both ages and even under the deferred conditions, which indicates the possibility of prelinguistic representational capacities.

Lemish and Rice (1986) conducted another research to examine the process of language acquisition through TV. They have observed 16 young children's behavior while viewing television in their homes for a period ranging from 6 to 8 months. During this period, the researchers visited the children four or five times in their homes. They recorded the occurrence of language-related behaviors among children and parents in TV viewing situations. They categorized children's

verbalizations as follows: "(1) designating objects, characters, animals and other things on the screen; (2) questioning about television content; (3) repetition of television dialogue or parental comments about television content; (4) description of television content" (p. 257). The parents' verbalizations were also divided into four categories paralleling to the children's. They are: "(1) designation, (2) questions, (3) responses to children comments, (4) description" (p. 257).

Lemish and Rice (1986) found strong parallels between these categories and the categories of interaction that other studies reported in the case of book-reading (see Ninio, 1980; Ninio & Bruner, 1978; Snow & Goldfield, 1983). These parallels are described as "designating," "questioning," "repetitions," and "descriptions." Based on this finding, Lemish and Rice propose a model of television as a talking picture book and argue that television has the potential of facilitating children's language acquisition. Their research suggests the strong possibility of language learning through TV, especially when accompanied by verbal interaction with their parents.

Lemish and Rice's model of television as a talking picture

book may be supported by applying Merleau-Ponty's (1964) theory of affectivity and language. This theory explains that there is a strong relationship between the acquisition of language and the configuration of the individual's affective environment. In the case of Lemish and Rice's model, children's language acquisition is explained by affective environment, which is created by both children and their parents through verbal and furthermore somatic interaction.

Merleau-Ponty (1964), however, emphasizes that this relationship between affectivity and language is not a causal one, but "the solidarity and unity of the two phenomena" (p. 113). He clarifies on this point by explaining the phenomena of children's acquisition of language and their relationship to the mother.

> Just as the maternal relation is (as the psychoanalysts say) a relation of *identification*, in which the subject projects on his mother what he himself experiences and assimilates the attitudes of his mother, so one could say that the acquisition of language is itself a phenomenon of

> identification. To learn to speak is to learn to play a series of *roles*, to assume a series of conducts or linguistic gestures. (p. 109)

Children constitute an affective environment in the relationship with their mothers. In this somatically constituted world, children identify themselves and their mothers. This identification is acquisition of language. For example, in the co-constituted affective world between children and their mothers, "mama" is often the first word that children utter. In Merleau-Ponty's word, "the linguistic progress is explained by the affective progress, in the sense in which expansion is *explained* by heat" (p.113).

This whole process is learning language as well as constituting the world. Learning words is not only recognizing the sounds, but also understanding the meaning. "The word has a meaning," (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. 177) and "the spoken word is a gesture and its meaning, a world" (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. 184).

In Merleau-Ponty's (1962) gestural theory of expression,

which needs to be explained to understand his basic concept, one expresses meaning bodily. To use body is to express one's intention via body. However, to use body does not mean that the body functions as a tool, but body itself is "an incarnate subject." For example, children acquire language as they learn how to identify themselves bodily in a new world. In terms of the relationship between affective environment and language, as children comport themselves in an affective environment, linguistic understanding arises in him.

This theory of affectivity and language may apply to the relationship between immigrant children and TV viewing. Immigrant children might learn the language of the host country by constituting a favorable environment with TV, where TV is not a thing itself, but a conscious being. TV is consciously arising in the world of the immigrant children. These two different consciousnesses are intermingled together and find the meaning of each other. It is like immigrant children are establishing "interpersonal relationship" with TV.

Based on this review of literature, the following phenomena could be expected:

(1) Immigrant children watch TV for purposes of language learning.

(2) Through TV viewing, immigrant children learn language.

In order to examine whether or not the phenomena mentioned above exist, unstructured interviews with Chinese immigrant children and their mothers were conducted.

Method

Wolf, Abelman, and Hexamer (1982) classified unstructured interviewing as an ethnographic method. Ethnographic method, according to Traudt (cited in Wolf et al., 1982), allows a researcher to examine social settings, although Traudt does not regard ethnomethodology as a research method, but as a term from the field of phenomenology in sociology which views man an active agent in the environment. Therefore, in order to understand Chinese immigrant children's TV viewing as a social phenomena, ethnographic method, specifically unstructured interviewing, is used in this study.

Since this research was designed as a pilot study, the number of interviewees was limited. Nine Chinese children

and 9 of their mothers were chosen randomly in the directory edited by the Association of Chinese Students and Scholars. However, one of the children and 2 of their mothers refused to be interviewed. Therefore, 8 Chinese children and 7 of their mothers were interviewed in their homes. In order to create a relaxed atmosphere and sometimes to overcome the language barrier, the researcher used a Chinese-English bilingual go-between. The go-between was instructed to freely ask questions related to TV viewing. This gave the researcher an opportunity to expand the conversation, giving time to observe interviewees' behaviors.

The age of the subject children ranges from 5 to 10 years old including 3 boys and 5 girls. The period of stay in the U. S. ranges from 7 months to 6 years and 4 months. Their command of English varies widely. In the cases of 9 and 5-year-old girls who have been in the U. S. for 7 months and 1.5 years, respectively, the researcher needed to ask the Chinese-English bilingual go-between to interpret. Other children spoke English fluently. These sample children knew no English

before coming to the U.S.

The fathers of the sample children are either graduate or post graduate students at a university in the central part of the U. S. Their mothers are housewives except one whom the researcher was not able to interview. Each interview lasted from 30 minutes to 3 hours.

Findings

The findings reported here are selective. The criteria of selection is relevancy to the study. Although unstructured interviewing generates a great deal of information about the interviewees' behaviors and thought, it often leads us to irrelevant talk, which is not reported here.

Chinese Immigrant Children Like to Watch TV

All of the sample children answered that they like to watch TV. They watch TV every day, although the range of time spent varies from 1 hour on weekdays and 2 hours on weekends on one hand to more than 3 hours on weekdays and 5 hours on weekends on the other hand. Preschool children watch TV more than school age children, because most of the latter group are told to limit the amount of TV viewing by their

mothers. In addition, they like American TV programs better than Chinese ones, which they used to watch in China, because American TV has more programs and they think American programs are fun to watch. In the central part of the U. S., access to Chinese TV programs, especially for children, are limited unlike the eastcoast and westcoast areas of the U. S. Some of the copies of Chinese TV programs are available, but very few of them are for children.

Chinese Immigrant Children Watch TV Alone

All of the children, except one 5-year-old girl, answered that they mostly watch TV alone. Even when they watch TV with their parents, which occurs very rarely, they do not talk about the program. The 5-year-olds girl does not talk about the program with her mother either, although she almost always watches TV with her mother, except when watching TV at preschool. AT preschool she watches TV with her teacher and other children. She said that her teacher explains about the contents of the programs they watch, but she can only understand a little (She has been in the U. S. for 1.5 years.).

Chinese Immigrant Children Like Cartoons

Cartoons, such as "Bugs Bunny," "Popye," "Yogie Bear," "Muppet Babies," and "The Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles," exemplify immigrant children's favorite programming. Besides cartoons, one 9-year-old boy who has stayed in the U. S. for 5 years likes to watch movies, and one 9-year-old girl who has stayed here for 6 years and 4 months likes "Hey Dude." Interestingly, the 9-year-old boy said that he used to like "Bugs Bunny" because it was easy to understand, but now he enjoys animation movies which have more complicated stories and dialogue.

Mothers of Chinese Immigrant Children
Want their Children to Learn English through TV

Most of the mothers encourage the children to watch TV when their children are of preschool age. They do so, especially, when they have recently arrived in the U. S. Most of them, however, start to tell their children not to watch TV too much after the children begin to go to elementary school. In the case of a 9-year-old boy, for example, when the boy came to the U. S., his parents subscribed to the Disney Channel

for him, hoping that it would help the boy learn English. In the case of a 7-year-old boy, his parents gave him a cartoon video tape which he had already watched in Chinese in China. He watched this tape over and over. Then, someone gave him two other tapes, "Wizard of Oz" and "Sound of Music," which he also watched again and again. Along with these 3 tapes, he watched cartoons on TV.

Chinese Children Learn English through TV Viewing

The sample children believe that they learned English, to some extent, through TV viewing. They said that they first did not understand the dialogues and narration of the program at all, but they were able to understand what is happening because of the animation. Therefore, they kept watching and gradually they started to understand the dialogues and narration of the program they watched.

Mothers of the sample children strongly believe that TV helped their children learn English. It seems they regard TV as a language teacher.

Discussion

The findings indicate that the immigrant children studied

do not watch TV specifically for language learning; they watch TV more or less for fun. On the other hand, it suggests that their mothers are very concerned about their children's acquisition of language and that they expect TV to strongly effect their children's language acquisition. They think, to some extent, TV teaches children language, although they cannot articulate how much TV helps their children learn the language.

The mothers, however, rarely watch TV with their children. Even when they do watch TV with them, they do not talk with them about the program they watch. This may be explained that they do not understand the content enough to explain to their children or discuss with them. In some cases of this study, children can understand and speak English more than their mothers. They sometimes even explain the definition of words to their mothers. Therefore, a model of television as a talking picture book, in which verbal interactions about TV programs with their mothers and/or siblings facilitate language learning(Lemish & Rice, 1986) cannot be applied to the case of immigrant children.

The question concerning the acquisition of language through TV remains, since both the children and their mothers answered that the children learned language through TV. Although this study cannot specify how much TV helped these children acquire language, Merleau-Ponty's (1964) theory of affectivity and language explain how they acquire language through TV viewing. In this study, the sample children stated that even if they first did not understand the language in a TV program, they thought the program they watched was fun. So, they kept watching and gradually they were able to pick up the words.

This relationship between immigrant children and TV, more specifically some TV characters by which they are attracted, is similar to that of the self and others explained by Merleau-Ponty (1962). He states how this relationship is established as follows:

> It is through my body that I understand other people, just as it is through my body that I perceive 'things.' The meaning of a gesture thus 'understand' is not behind it, it is intermingled with the structure of the world outlined

> by the gesture, and which I take up my own account (p. 186)

My body as an incarnated subject constitutes the world with the bodies of others. Through this integration of the bodies, I can communicate with others.

When immigrant children watch TV, they see themselves in their favorite characters on the TV screen and try to communicate with them in the same process that Merleau-Ponty describes. In this viewing process, immigrant children begin to live their intentions in the expressions of these characters on TV screen and begin to live the volitions of TV characters in their own gestures.

In this affective environment that the immigrant children established with the TV characters, they can learn the language of the host country, according to Merleau-Ponty's (1964) affectivity and language theory. Merleau-Ponty says: "The intellectual elaboration of our experience of the world [specifically, language acquisition] is supported by the affective elaboration of our inter-human relations. . . The linguistic usage achieved by the child depends strictly on the 'position' that is

taken by the child at every moment in the play of forces in this family and his human environment" (p. 112-113). If this is so, our immigrant children are establishing inter-human-like relationship with their favorite TV characters, which help them acquire the language. Especially, considering the limited experience of interaction with other people in their host country in the early stage of immigration, immigrant children's personal relationship with TV characters explains the linguistic progress.

Limitations

This analysis may be confounded, since all factors, other than TV, to facilitate the acquisition of language are ignored. The children may learn language at school or through personal interaction. However, since the previous study showed that new immigrants heavily depend on mass media in their first isolated stage (Zohoori, 1988), it is safe to say that through TV viewing immigrant children learn the language of the host country.

This study needs to be substantiated by increasing the sample number and by using children from various countries.

Also, longitudinal, observational study may reveal the process of language acquisition of immigrant children through TV viewing more clearly. It is hoped that the present pilot study will generate following studies.

Reference

Infante, D. A., Rancer, A. S., & Womack, D. F. (1990). Building communication theory. Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland.

Kim, Y. Y. (1976). Communication patterns of foreign immigrants in the process of acculturation: A survey among the Korean population in Chicago. Ph. D. Dissertation, Northwestern University.

Kim, Y. Y. (1977). Communication patterns of foreign immigrants in the process of acculturation. Human Communication Research,4, 105-113.

Lemish, D., & Rice, M. L. (1986). Television as a talking picture book: A prop for language acquisition. The Child Language, 13, 251-274.

Meltzoff, A. N. (1988). Imitation of televised models by infants. Child Development, 59, 1221-1229.

Merleau-Ponty, M. (1962). Phenomenology of perception (C. Smith, Trans.). New York: The Humanities Press.

Merleau-Ponty, M. (1964). The child's relations with others (W. Cobb, Trans.). In J. M. Edie (Ed.), The primacy of perception. Evanston: Northwestern University Press.

Ninio, A. (1980). Picture-book reading in mother-infant dyads belonging to two subgroups in Israel. Child Development, 51, 587-590.

Ninio, A., & Bruner, J. (1978). The achievement and antecedents of labelling. The Child Language, 5, 1-15.

Rice, M. L., & Woodsmall, L. (1988). Lessons form television: Children's word learning when viewing. Child Development, 59, 420-429.

Rubin, A. M. (1977). Television usage, attitudes and viewing behaviors of children and adolescents. Journal of Broadcasting, 21, 355-369.

Snow, C. E., & Goldfield, B. A. (1983). Turn the page please: Situation-specific language acquisition. The Child Language, 10, 551-569.

Wolf, M. A., Abelman. R., & Hexamer, A. (1982). Children's understanding of television: Some methodological considerations and a question-asking model for receivership skills. In M. Bugoon (Ed.), Communication Yearbook 5 (pp. 405-431).

Zohoori, A. R. (1988). A cross-cultural analysis of children's television use. Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media, 32 (1), 105-113.